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Department of State

TELEGRAM

CONFIDENTIAL

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EXCISE

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ACTION EA-13

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 PM-03 NSC-10 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00

NSAE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01 OMB-01 T-01 GAC-01 AID-10

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TO SECSTATE AASHDC 7520

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY *Ambley* DATE *10/9/80*

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SUBJECT: KHMER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

SUMMARY: WITH IN TAM ATTRACTING CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT AND KEO AN'S SIHANOUKIST CANDIDACY MORE OF A FACTOR THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT, CAMBODIA'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION HAS TURNED INTO A REAL RACE. LON NOL'S SUPPORTERS ARE REACTING VIGOROUSLY. FANK IS THROWING ITS WEIGHT HEAVILY ON THE SIDE OF THE MARSHAL, AND IN TAM HAS APPARENTLY ALREADY BEEN PROBED FOR A POSSIBLE COALITION SOLUTION IN WHICH HE BECOMES PRIME MINISTER. AT WEEK'S END IN TAM IS STILL IN THE RACE BUT THE PRESSURE IS BUILDING ON ALL THE CANDIDATES AND A COALITION SOLUTION BEFORE OR MORE LIKELY AFTER THE BALLOTING REMAINS A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY. END SUMMARY.

AS CAMPAIGN OPENED, THE GOVERNMENT, AND PARTICULARLY THE ARMY, APPEARED TO BECOME BELATEDLY AWARE OF EXTENT OF SUPPORT FOR OPPOSITION CANDIDATE IN TAM, WHICH COULD RESULT IN AN UNEXPECTED VICTORY FOR THE LATTER, WHO, HOWEVER, HAS VERY LITTLE SUPPORT AMONG THE ARMY. THERE WAS OPEN TALK OF A MILITARY COUP D'ETAT BY VARIOUS GENERALS TO INSTALL LON NOL AS PRESIDENT REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME. A PREVIOUS THREAT BY GENERAL SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ THAT IN TAM'S CANDIDACY COULD MEAN CIVIL WAR WAS MENTIONED IN THE

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2. THUS FAR, HOWEVER, THE ARMY HAS CONTENTED ITSELF ONLY WITH VERY VIGOROUS CANVASSING FOR THE MARSHAL. ON MAY 26 GENERALS FERNANDEZ AND NORODOM CHANTARANGSEY ARRIVED FROM KOMPONG SEPUL WITH A BODY OF TROOPS BEARING BANNERS AND PORTRAITS OF THE MARSHAL AND DEMONSTRATED BEFORE HIS HOUSE BEFORE PARADING IN THE STREETS. THE MARSHAL, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY GIVEN THE IMPRESSION, IF NOT ORDERS TO ALLOW THE CAMPAIGN TO PROCEED IN ORDERLY AND QUIET FASHION, LET IT BE KNOWN THAT HE APPRECIATED THIS DEMONSTRATION OF SUPPORT. INTERPRETING THIS AS A GUIDE FOR ACTION, FANK HEADQUARTERS THREW ITSELF INTO THE CAMPAIGN WITH ALL ITS RESOURCES, ORGANIZING A LONG AND LARGELY MILITARY CARAVAN IN THE CAPITAL MAY 27 WITH BANNERS, FLOATS, AND PORTRAITS OF THE MARSHAL, PASTING PORTRAITS OF THE MARSHAL ON TREES AND WALLS, AND ORDERING RESTAURANT PROPRIETORS TO HANG THEM IN THEIR PREMISES AND GIVE FREE MEALS TO THOSE PROMISING TO VOTE FOR HIM. EMBASSY CONTACTS WHO INITIALLY CREDITED IN TAM WITH A MAJORITY OF THE VOTERS NOW BELIEVE THAT THESE MASSIVE DISPLAYS WILL REDRESS THE BALANCE IN FAVOR OF THE MARSHAL. ONE NEWSPAPER FELT THAT MANY IN TAM SUPPORTERS, INTIMIDATED BY THE TENSION, WOULD VOTE FOR THE MARSHAL IN ORDER TO AVERT CIVIL DISTURBANCES OR A MILITARY COUP.

3. DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE IN TAM ISSUED HIS PROPOSED PROGRAM ON MAY 22, EMPHASIZING THE POINTS ON WHICH THE MARSHAL IS MOST VULNERABLE: CORRUPTION, THE PLIGHT OF MILITARY DEPENDENTS AND VETERANS, AND MILITARY WEAKNESS. HE PROMISED TO REDUCE THE POWERS OF THE PRESIDENCY IN THE CONSTITUTION AND ENCOURAGE GRASS-ROOTS DEMOCRACY THROUGH LOCAL COUNCILS ELECTED BY THE INHABITANTS. HE ALSO PROMISED TO "REEDUCATE" THE ARMY TO IMPROVE BOTH ITS MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS AND ITS RAPPORT WITH THE PEOPLE AND COMPLAINED THAT THE MISTAKES OF THE GOVERNMENT HAD DRIVEN MANY KHMER INTO THE ARMS OF THE ENEMY. IN CONTRAST TO THE GOVERNMENT HE THUS ACKNOWLEDGED THE

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EXISTENCE OF THE KHMER ROUGE AS A FORCE INDEPENDENT OF THE VC/NVA. HE PROPOSED A DIALOGUE WITH THE KHMER ROUGE AND A NEUTRAL FOREIGN POLICY, REFERRING, HOWEVER TO "OUR GREAT AMERICAN FRIENDS".

4. THE PRESS REPORTED THAT TWO PROMINENT SUPPORTERS OF LON NOL HAD VISITED IN TAM AND THAT THE LATTER HAD SET HIS PRICE FOR WITHDRAWAL AS THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP FOR HIMSELF AND THE VICE PRESIDENCY FOR SON NGOC THANH. WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO DETERMINE WHETHER THIS APPROACH WAS SERIOUS OR IN THE NATURE OF A TRIAL BALLOON. IN ANY CASE IN TAM, WITHOUT DENYING THE REPORT, ANNOUNCED ON MAY 26 THAT HE WOULD NOT WITHDRAW.

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5. THE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE DEMOCRATS, FEEBLE COMPARED TO THE RESOURCES OF THE GOVERNMENT, WAS SUDDENLY DELUGED WITH SWARMS OF WILLING AND HIGHLY MOBILE CAMPAIGN WORKERS DUE IN PART TO LON NOL'S APPOINTMENT, ON MAY 10, OF SIRIK MATAK, AS HIS "SPECIAL COUNSELOR". LARGE NUMBERS OF STUDENTS, THEIR RECENT SUCCESSFUL DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST HIM FRESH IN MEMORY AND EVER ALERT TO "ROYALIST" PRETENSIONS, VOLUNTEERED TO WORK FOR THE DEMOCRATS, AND THEIR HONDAS AND BICYCLES COULD BE SEEN DAILY BY THE HUNDREDS PARKED AROUND IN TAM'S MODEST RESIDENCE. FOR THE FIRST TIME THEIR BANNERS, WHICH THEY HUNG ABOUT TOWN, DENOUNCED THE MARSHAL BY NAME! "LON NOL IS THE FATHER OF CORRUPTION"; "LON NOL PLUS SIRIK MATAK MEANS THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE KHMER NATION"; "WE ARE AGAINST WHOEVER PROTECTS SIRIK MATAK"; "BOTH ARE CORRUPT AND CANNOT BE SEPARATED"; "DOWN WITH THE REACTIONARY POLICY OF LON NOL"; "DON'T USE CAMBODIA AS PERSONAL PROPERTY" (A DEMOCRATIC SLOGAN).

6. THE DEMOCRATS THROUGHOUT THE WEEK CONCERNED THEMSELVES WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF FRAUD AND THEY SOUGHT THE ASSISTANCE OF THE EMBASSY (POLITELY REFUSED) IN OBTAINING, ON TWO WEEK'S NOTICE, SUFFICIENT INDELIBLE

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INK TO MARK THE FINGERS OF CLOSE TO TWO MILLION VOTERS TO PREVENT MULTIPLE VOTING -- WHICH PROPOSAL COLLAPSED FOR LACK OF INK AND OFFICIAL FEARS OF REPRISALS AGAINST INKED VOTERS IN INSECURE AREAS. THEY PROTESTED THE PROVISION THAT THE MILITARY VOTE IN THEIR ENCAMPMENTS UNDER THE ALLEGEDLY INTIMIDATING EYES OF THEIR PRO-LON NOL COMMANDRES, BUT AGAIN, SECURITY PRECLUDES THE DISPERSAL OF THE TROOPS TO CIVILIAN POLLING PLACES.

7. GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN PROTESTED THE MARSHAL'S HONEST INTENTIONS, POINTING OUT THAT HE COULD HAVE ACCEPTED IN TAM'S SUGGESTION OF SOME MONTHS AGO TO INSTALL HIM SIMPLY BY A VOTE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (A FOREGONE CONCLUSION), BUT THAT HE HAD OPTED FOR THE DEMOCRATIC WAY. A GROUP OF ANXIOUS OFFICERS PREPARED A DECREE FOR LON NOL TO SIGN FORBIDDING ANYONE TO CAMPAIGN IN SIHANOUK'S NAME, ONLY TO HAVE THE MARSHAL QUASH IT. THE VERY DISORDERLINESS OF KHMER VOTING PROCEDURES DOES NOT LEND ITSELF TO MORE THAN HAPHAZARD CHICANERY, AND WE DO NOT CREDIT THE GOVERNMENT WITH SUFFICIENT ORGANIZING ABILITY TO ORCHESTRATE EFFECTIVE, PLAUSIBLE NATIONWIDE FRAUD. THE GOVERNMENT SEEMS RATHER TO BE COUNTING ON GAINING THE DAY THROUGH CREATION OF A "BANDWAGON EFFECT" INDUCED BY MASSIVE DEMONSTRATIONS, POSTERS, MARTIAL MUSIC, AND APPEALS TO UNITY AND PATRIOTISM. HUYNH MONG, AN EX-CANDIDATE NOW SUPPORTING IN TAM, ESTIMATED THAT ABOUT HALF OF THE INHABITANTS OUTSIDE PHNOM PENH ARE STILL INCLINED TO VOTE AS THEY ALWAYS HAVE, THAT IS, ACCORDING TO THE SUGGESTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES OR THE BONZES, MOST OF THE FORMER WOULD OF COURSE FAVOR LON NOL, WHILE THE LATTER, THOUGH LESS ACTIVE, WOULD PROBABLY LEAN IN THE MARSHAL'S FAVOR DUE TO THE PRESENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THEIR FAVORITE, THE EX-BONZE PRIME MINISTER SON NGOC THANH.

8. COMMENT, DESPITE THE UNACCUSTOMED HEAT OF THE CAMPAIGN, KHMER TEND TO BACK AWAY FROM EYEBALL-TO-EYEBALL CONFRONTATIONS. WE BELIEVE THAT THE ELECTION WILL BE HELD WITH ONLY MINOR DISTURBANCES AND THAT THE CRISIS, IF ANY, WILL COME AFTERWARD SHOULD IN TAM WIN A MAJORITY, SHOULD LON NOL'S MAJORITY

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BE SO SLIM AS TO BE TANTAMOUNT TO PROOF OF LOSS  
OF CONFIDENCE ON THE PART OF A SIGNIFICANT SEGMENT  
OF THE POPULATION, OR SHOULD NEITHER GAIN A  
MAJORITY. ALTHOUGH THE ELECTORAL LAW PROVIDES FOR  
A RUNOFF, SOME SORT OF COALITION GOVERNMENT APPEARS  
TO US LIKELY IN THE LAST AS WELL AS THE FORMER CASES.  
BOTH SIDES (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE UNRULY STUDENTS)  
SEEM TO BE TRYING TO REFRAIN FROM PERSONAL ATTACKS  
WHICH MIGHT PRECLUDE LATER RECONCILIATION AND  
COLLABORATION. GIVEN THE INEXPERIENCE AND VOLATILITY  
OF THE KHMER ELECTORATE IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN, NOW  
THAT LON NOL'S SUPPORTERS ARE CAMPAIGNING VERY  
ACTIVELY, HOW CLOSE THE RACE REALLY WILL BE.  
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